

# **Rural Tourism Marketing**

## **Chapter Two – Tourism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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Tourism is the leading growth industry in the new millennium. More people than ever before have the ability to see the world. A great philosopher once said “The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page.”

And the decision to travel, where and when to go and what to see is more than ever one that is made by the consumer/traveler himself, gathering his or her own information from a variety of sources. Access to the media has never been greater, and exposure to images of far off places, or little known destinations just around the corner is vast. Potential vacationers can watch adventure travel shows filmed halfway around the world, or watch and listen as Huell Howser describes California’s Gold in our own backyard.

### **The Internet and the Travel Industry**

There is a revolution happening in the travel industry and it’s called the Internet. It is changing the way people plan and purchase travel, and it is putting the world at the



fingertips of consumers. It is such a significant new tool that we devote an entire chapter to it a bit later in this handbook.

But for now, we’ll simply say that the Internet may well replace the printed brochure or visitors guide as we know it. It may replace the travel agent, or at least have a drastic impact on the amount of plane tickets, hotel reservations or car rentals sold by the agent in your neighborhood.

It is a revolutionary tool that you need to use to your advantage. It levels the playing field significantly between rural communities and major attractions. It is the major agent for change in the travel industry in the coming century, and a chapter called Tourism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century would not be complete without emphasizing that fact.

You’ll find a great deal of information about using the Internet to your advantage in Chapter 11, so we’ll devote this chapter to other trends in tourism.

## Let's Go Someplace New!

How about this as great news for lesser-known travel destinations:

According to a recent study of American travel habits and trends, *seventy percent of those surveyed said they don't want to go where they've been before...they want to go someplace new!* And if you think your destination qualifies as “someplace new,” then you are probably perfectly positioned to benefit from this trend.

Other information contained in a recent report is equally exciting for rural destinations.

The “hot trends” in tourism were listed as the following in order of popularity.

1. Cruises
2. Remote, untouched destinations
3. Spa going
4. Gaming
5. Vacation ownership



The first three choices clearly indicate an “escapist trend” in vacationing. When creating your rural marketing pieces, don’t forget terms like “escape,” “untouched,” “undiscovered” and even “remote” to appeal to this clientele.

## More Money – Less Time

People are finding themselves with enough money to take the vacation they want, but not enough time, according to the same report. So more and more vacations are being taken closer to home, and for shorter periods, with twice as many people staying for four days or less as those staying for more than five days.

This may well mean that if your destination is located within four hours of a major metropolitan market, it might be your best bet for targeting your first promotional campaign.

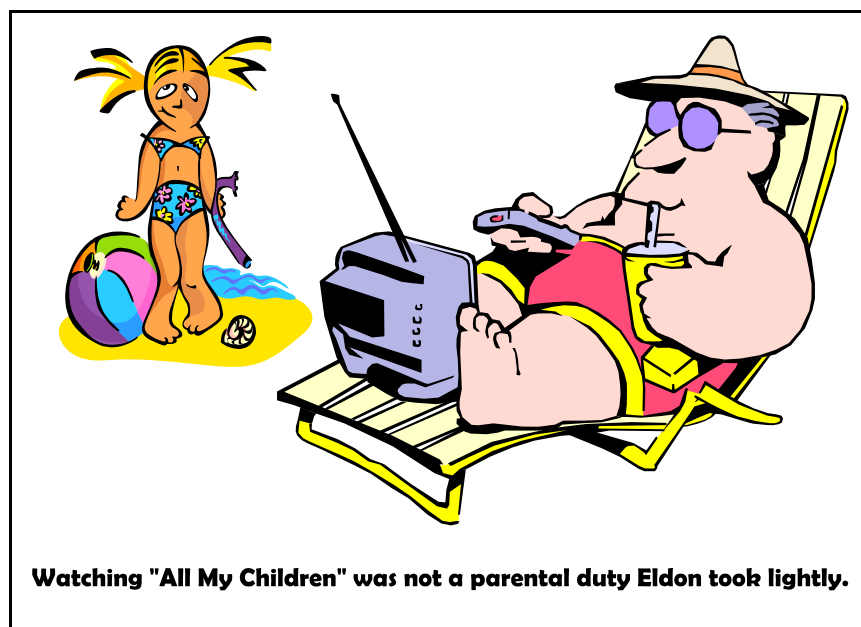
Even though people these days say time is tight, very few are planning to take fewer vacations. In fact, more vacations of shorter duration seem to be the trend.

Ninety-two percent of Americans take at least one vacation a year, but 62 percent plan to take more vacations in the coming years than they have before. And 59 percent plan to take what they call “mini-vacations.”

According to recent survey by a well-known tourism organization, 70 percent of travelers visit only one state or country per trip, and they do so primarily in their own automobiles (71 percent). That is not likely to change in the coming years and is a tremendous advantage to rural destinations seeking to attract travelers, as it give visitors maximum flexibility during their vacations.

### **What's a Vacation Without Kids?**

More people are taking their kids along on trips, and spending much more money because they do!



According to *Insights*, the official publication of California Tourism, about 26 percent of travelers have children along on leisure (non-business) trips. While that figure has remained relatively steady over the years, there has been a huge increase in people who take the kids along

with them when they travel for business, up nearly 50 percent from 1997 to 1998, the last year for which statistics are available.

This might suggest that if you have a rural destination near a large convention city, targeting convention delegates who bring their families along might be just the ticket for getting them to take a side trip to your area.

### **The Vacation as a Learning Experience**

Travelers want more thoughtful and more active vacations, to include enrichment tourism – visiting historical sites and cultural events. That’s one reason so many communities are holding successful historical and cultural festivals, celebrating their unique attributes.

From Gold Discovery Day in the foothill community of Colma, to San Francisco’s Chinese New Year Celebrations to Carlsbad’s Latino Days, a community’s cultural heritage is often a strong draw to visitors.

According to a study on travel by U.S. adults conducted by a major industry organization, 27% of U.S. travelers included a visit to a museum or historic place on their itinerary, while 17% included a cultural event or festival on their trip. Combined, 33% of all U.S. adult travelers (65.9 million) included an historic place or cultural event in their trip.

Jazz festivals, art shows and Indian Pow-Wows are increasingly appearing in travel guidebooks and calendars as reasons to visit destinations, both big and small.

A renowned travel writer once said, “travel is scarcely worth the effort unless it is associated with people, learning and ideas.” He asserts that travel should challenge our preconceptions and views, cause us to rethink our assumptions and make us more broad-minded and understanding.

Robert Barrett is Vice President of Domestic Marketing for the Los Angeles Convention & Visitors Bureau and widely acknowledged as one of the leaders in the phenomenon known as cultural tourism. He claims “The stage is...set for an explosion in cultural tourism. We have a new generation of enlightened travelers. Visitor spending is on the rise. And cultural opportunities abound nationwide.”

Barrett advises forming “collaborative alliances” between the cultural community and the tourism industries in a city. “Such an alliance plays a crucial role in determining the image--and, ultimately, the reality--of a place’s character. The relationship between culture and tourism is more than symbiotic: it is defining.” See Chapter 9 for more on this phenomenon.

## **Taking Home on the Road**

More travelers are taking their hotel rooms with them in the form of recreational vehicles (RV). Baby boomers are now reaching the RV age, and although this business is highly cyclical, use of RVs should continue to trend upward.

Today's typical RV owner (including owners of travel trailers and other "towables") is 48 years old, married, with an income of \$47,000 per year and no children living at home. According to the same report, loading up a recreational vehicle and heading to the great frontier (or at least dreaming about it) is becoming a popular pastime among younger travelers as well, with nearly one in four households headed by 35-54 year olds intending to buy an RV. This includes both trailers and truck campers, as people increasingly buy rugged sports utility vehicles as their everyday cars.



How do these trends affect you and the way you market your destination? First, it means that as long as you're accessible by highway, you're accessible to the majority of vacation travelers. It also means that you might not have to feel limited by a lack of hotel or motel accommodations in your efforts to market your destination. As long as there is a campground or RV parking area, you can and probably will attract overnight visitors.

## **The Vacation as a Culinary Experience**

In a trend that won't surprise anyone, travelers like to eat. But recent surveys indicate a new type of traveler that the San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau calls a "foodie." Those people actively consider the dining opportunities when planning their travel experiences. Does your region have a particular food attraction upon which you can capitalize, such as "Santa Maria Style Barbecue" or "Lindsay Olives" or garlic like they grow in Gilroy?



If so, marketing to this group of culinary travelers could be your key to success.

## Agri-Tourism, Eco-Tourism and More

One of the mainstays of the visitor industry along California's magnificent coastline for the past several years has been the whale-watching excursion. Bringing valuable tourist dollars during the winter months, traditionally the off-season on the coast, this eco-tourism (short for "ecological-tourism") phenomenon is a prime example of using mother nature as a magnet for visitors.

Using the environment as a tourist attraction isn't necessarily limited to coastal or mountain communities, just clever ones, as evidenced by Visalia's creation of a "Fog Festival" in January. Can you imagine celebrating something as dreary as "Tule fog" in the San Joaquin Valley? The tourism marketers in Visalia could, and the result is a terrific little event with ice carving, food booths and a soup cook-off.

Bird watching and Watchable Wildlife programs, farm tours like Fresno's successful Blossom

### **The Latest Crop for California Farmers Might be Tourists!**

Some California farmers are discovering that it isn't just beaches, mountains and Disneyland that tourists find attractive.

New programs enabled by recent changes in California state law are allowing farmers to open their homes, barns and fields to tourism, with potentially lucrative results.

You may have been to "U-pick" strawberry fields near Oxnard or the See Canyon Apple Farms of San Luis Obispo County, but now farmers and ranchers are actually inviting overnight guests to become a part of the farming experience.

Part of the reason for the growth in agri-tourism is the constant economic pressure on agricultural enterprises. But also because a growing desire exists in the farming community to share their lifestyle experience with those who may have never milked a cow, picked a fresh orange or gathered an egg from a real, live chicken.

Farm based bed & breakfast operations may not be common yet, but California Tourism officials hope that one day in the not too distant future, they will be. For more information on farm-stay programs within California, contact Eileen Hook at California Tourism.



Trail program (you'll read about that in Chapter 3) and the state's new program allowing farmers to go into the lodging business, albeit on a small scale, through "farm stays" are more evidence of creative thinking to develop visitor industries where none existed before.

As you can see, tourism is an ever-changing industry. But with the right approach and a knack for staying on top of, and not behind, the current trends you can position your destination to take maximum advantage of industry changes.

Take a moment to assess current trends relative to your own destination.

Which of the preceding trends are most applicable to your area and how can you take advantage of them? List the three most applicable trends to your community and what you might do to attract those travelers influenced by that trend.

For example:

<b>Trend</b>	<b>How to take advantage of it</b>
<u>RV Usage Up</u>	<u>Place a billboard urging travelers to turn off the freeway</u> <u>and visit our town.</u>
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